

**§ 648.71 Surfclam and ocean quahog Annual Catch Targets (ACT).**

(a) The MAFMC staff shall identify and review the relevant sources of management uncertainty to recommend ACTs to the MAFMC as part of the surfclam and ocean quahog specification process. The MAFMC staff recommendations shall identify the specific sources of management uncertainty that were considered, technical approaches to mitigating these sources of uncertainty, and any additional relevant information considered in the ACT recommendation process.

(1) *Sectors.* The surfclam ACT and the sum of the Maine and non-Maine ocean quahog ACTs shall be less than or equal to the ACL for the corresponding stock. The MAFMC staff shall recommend any reduction in catch necessary to address management uncertainty, consistent with paragraph (a) of this section.

(2) *Periodicity.* ACTs may be established on an annual basis for up to 3 years at a time, dependent on whether the SSC provides single or multiple year ABC recommendations.

(b) *Performance review.* The MAFMC staff shall conduct a detailed review of fishery performance relative to ACTs in conjunction with any ACL performance review, as outlined in § 648.70(b)(1) through (3).

[76 FR 60622, Sept. 29, 2011]

**§ 648.72 Surfclam and ocean quahog specifications.**

(a) *Establishing catch quotas.* The amount of surfclams or ocean quahogs that may be caught annually by fishing vessels subject to these regulations will be specified for up to a 3-year period by the Regional Administrator. Specifications of the annual quotas will be accomplished in the final year of the quota period, unless the quotas are modified in the interim pursuant to paragraph (b) of this section. The amount of surfclams available for harvest annually must be specified within the range of 1.85 to 3.4 million bu (98.5 to 181 million L). The amount of ocean quahogs available for harvest annually must be specified within the range of 4 to 6 million bu (213 to 319.4 million L). Quotas for surfclams and ocean qua-

hogs may be specified below these ranges if the ABC recommendation of the SSC limits the ACL to a value less than the minimum of the range indicated.

(1) *Quota reports.* On an annual basis, MAFMC staff will produce and provide to the MAFMC an Atlantic surfclam and ocean quahog annual quota recommendation paper based on the ABC recommendation of the SSC, the latest available stock assessment report prepared by NMFS, data reported by harvesters and processors, and other relevant data, as well as the information contained in paragraphs (a)(1)(i) through (vi) of this section. Based on that report, and at least once prior to August 15 of the year in which a multi-year annual quota specification expires, the MAFMC, following an opportunity for public comment, will recommend to the Regional Administrator annual quotas and estimates of DAH and DAP within the ranges specified for up to a 3-year period. In selecting the annual quotas, the MAFMC shall consider the current stock assessments, catch reports, and other relevant information concerning:

(i) Exploitable and spawning biomass relative to the OY.

(ii) Fishing mortality rates relative to the OY.

(iii) Magnitude of incoming recruitment.

(iv) Projected effort and corresponding catches.

(v) Geographical distribution of the catch relative to the geographical distribution of the resource.

(vi) Status of areas previously closed to surfclam fishing that are to be opened during the year and areas likely to be closed to fishing during the year.

(2) *Public review.* Based on the recommendation of the MAFMC, the Regional Administrator shall publish proposed surfclam and ocean quahog quotas in the FEDERAL REGISTER. The Regional Administrator shall consider public comments received, determine the appropriate annual quotas, and publish the annual quotas in the FEDERAL REGISTER. The quota shall be set at that amount that is most consistent with the objectives of the Atlantic Surfclam and Ocean Quahog FMP. The Regional Administrator may set

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quotas at quantities different from the MAFMC's recommendations only if he/she can demonstrate that the MAFMC's recommendations violate the national standards of the Magnuson-Stevens Act or the objectives of the Atlantic Surfclam and Ocean Quahog FMP or other applicable law.

(b) *Interim quota modifications.* Based upon information presented in the quota reports described in paragraph (a)(1) of this section, the MAFMC may recommend to the Regional Administrator a modification to the annual quotas that have been specified for a 3-year period and any estimate of DAH or DAP made in conjunction with such specifications within the ranges specified in paragraph (a)(1) of this section. Based upon the MAFMC's recommendation, the Regional Administrator may propose surfclam and or ocean quahog quotas that differ from the annual quotas specified for the current 3-year period. Such modification shall be in effect for a period of up to 3 years, unless further modified. Any interim modification shall follow the same procedures for establishing the annual quotas that are specified for up to a 3-year period.

(c) *Annual quotas.* The annual quotas for surfclams and ocean quahogs will remain effective unless revised pursuant to this section. At the end of a multiyear quota period, NMFS will issue notification in the FEDERAL REGISTER if the previous year's specifications will not be changed.

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## § 648.73 Surfclam and ocean quahog Accountability Measures.

(a) *Commercial ITQ fishery.* (1) If the ACL for surfclam or ocean quahog is exceeded, and the overage can be attributed to one or more ITQ allocation holders, the full amount of the overage will be deducted from the appropriate ITQ allocation in the following fishing year.

(2) Any amount of an ACL overage that cannot be otherwise attributed to an ITQ allocation holder will be deducted from the appropriate ACL in the following fishing year.

(b) *Maine mahogany quahog fishery.* If the ocean quahog ACL is exceeded, and the Maine mahogany quahog fishery is

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responsible for the overage, than the Maine fishery ACT shall be reduced in the following year by an amount equal to the ACL overage.

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## § 648.74 Annual individual allocations.

(a) *General.* (1) Each fishing year, the Regional Administrator shall determine the initial allocation of surfclams and ocean quahogs for the next fishing year for each allocation holder owning an allocation pursuant to paragraph (a)(2) of this section. For each species, the initial allocation for the next fishing year is calculated by multiplying the allocation percentage owned by each allocation owner as of the last day of the previous fishing year in which allocation owners are permitted to permanently transfer allocation percentage pursuant to paragraph (b) of this section (*i.e.*, October 15 of every year), by the quota specified by the Regional Administrator pursuant to § 648.72. The total number of bushels of allocation shall be divided by 32 to determine the appropriate number of cage tags to be issued or acquired under § 648.77. Amounts of allocation of 0.5 cages or smaller created by this division shall be rounded downward to the nearest whole number, and amounts of allocation greater than 0.5 cages created by this division shall be rounded upward to the nearest whole number, so that allocations are specified in whole cages. These allocations shall be made in the form of an allocation permit specifying the allocation percentage and the allocation in cages and cage tags for each species. An allocation permit is only valid for the entity for which it is issued. Such permits shall be issued on or before December 15, to allow allocation owners to purchase cage tags from a vendor specified by the Regional Administrator pursuant to § 648.77(b).

(2) The Regional Administrator may, after publication of a fee notification in the FEDERAL REGISTER, charge a permit fee before issuance of the permit to recover administrative expenses. Failure to pay the fee will preclude issuance of the permit.

(b) *Transfers—*(1) *Allocation percentage.* Subject to the approval of the Regional Administrator, part or all of an